DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 323 CS 215 374

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TITLE Literature as the Laboratory of the Moral Life: Building Moral Communities through Literature Study.
PUB DATE 11 Nov 94
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Moral Education (20th, Banff, Alberta, Canada, November 11, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Critical Reading; Ethical Instruction; Higher Education; Learning Strategies; *Literature Appreciation; *Moral Development; Moral Values; *Reader Response; *Reader Text Relationship; Secondary Education; *Student Development
IDENTIFIERS *Aesthetic Reading; Historical Background; Moral Reasoning; Narrative Text

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of literature as a moral laboratory in which author and readers run complex thought experiments about human actions and their consequences. The paper warns that discussion of the role of literature in building moral character and moral communities needs to be based on a better understanding of what literature is and how it works. The paper states that reading literature can develop a sense of all that must be taken into account in forming complex moral judgments--with proper pedagogy, literary study helps readers develop this sense more consciously and deliberately, and situates this process within a larger dialogue about values. The paper points out that literature is potentially powerful in moral development because it mobilizes an affective response as well as a cognitive one. The paper suggests that teachers must emphasize both individual reader responses and group processes that model and foster community and offers techniques for helping readers focus attention on their own experiences in relation to their reading of particular texts. Some effective classroom techniques listed in the paper are: (1) using reading logs or response journals; (2) creating semantic maps; (3) dramatizing works; and (4) having students write narratives of their own experiences. The paper also suggests several generic prompts for teachers to use to encourage students in multilevel thinking and ideas for modeling how moral discourse takes place within a community of readers. Contains 56 references and 9 notes. (CR)

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Literature as the Laboratory of the Moral Life:

Building Moral Communities Through Literary Study

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Paper Presented at the 20th Annual Conference of the
Association for Moral Education
Banff, Alberta
November 11, 1994

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I. Introduction

The many challenges--environmental, political, economic, etc.-- facing our contemporary communities are enormous and exceedingly complex, so much so that many see the modern world as in an endemic state of crisis. To resolve these complex issues, we must balance values against values. Our communities need individuals and groups capable of recognizing and handling the moral complexity (among the other complexities) of these issues. How do we form such moral agents?

Literature provides a laboratory in which the ethical and moral dimensions of human actions can be readily perceived and thought about. Unlike most other areas of study, which claim to be "values-neutral," literary study has values at its very heart. Yet the potential of literature to develop moral character is often unrealized. This could be because the connection between literature and moral life goes unrecognized, or because it is oversimplified.

Those who don't recognize the connection may value literature as a way to promote either "cultural literacy" (Hirsch, 1987) or purely aesthetic appreciation. And of course there are those who don't value literature at all. Those who do recognize the moral

Abstract

Discussion of the role of literature in building moral character and moral communities needs to be based on a better understanding of what literature is and how it works. In this paper, we develop the concept of literature as a "moral laboratory" in which author and readers run complex thought experiments about human actions and their consequences. Reading literature can develop a sense of all that must be taken into account in forming complex moral judgments. With the proper pedagogy, literary study helps readers develop this sense more consciously and deliberately, and situates this process within a larger dialogue about values.

dimension of literature--educators, censors, politicians--often oversimplify the relationship between literature and the moral life, viewing literature either as an unambiguous codification of the community's moral ideals ("Read good books, and you will become a good person"), or as an appealing invitation to reject society's norms ("Read bad books, and you will become a bad person"). The current burgeoning discussion of virtue and morality in the popular press (see Newsweek, June 13,1994, on "The Politics of Virtue," for example) shows the continuing strength of this simplified view of the relation between literature and the moral life.

II. Morality -- Some Reflections

Though neither of us is a moral philosopher, we would like to begin with a few reflections on the moral life. We offer our observations both to lay out our own starting points and to prompt further discussion of how our view of literature might relate to various other ethical theories and visions of human life.

For us, moral reasoning, which everyone acknowledges has practical consequences, has an affective as well as a cognitive dimension (see Hume, 1966).[1] Literature is potentially powerful in moral development because it mobilizes an affective response as well as a cognitive one; indeed the emotional power of literature is one of the reasons that some, from Plato on, have found literature dangerous to the moral life.[2]

Along with Andrew Auge, we have strong reservations about a certain approach to the moral life, an approach which Auge

characterizes as "the belief that praiseworthy moral character must be harmonious, stable, and uniform--the result of living in accordance with a single, internally consistent system of moral rules" (1989, p. 11). As Auge points out, "We are often taught to believe that living well means adhering to an established framework of moral rules and precepts that can encompass whatever situation arises and thereby protect us from dangerous and damaging conflicts" (p. 14). According to this view, interpreting each new situation in terms of an already harmonized set of precepts would prevent or eliminate potentially disruptive tension in an individual's moral life. While the attempt to reduce tension and immunize from conflicts may indeed aptly characterize much of moral life, we believe that another principle is also at work.

In his Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud (1961) found that the Pleasure Principle, the drive to reduce tension, had to be complemented by another principle--Eros, or the drive to make things more complicated, to build rather than to reduce, to generate something new rather than to return to the familiar. Similarly, we would suggest that a reductive morality or moral vision must be complemented by a generative moral vision. Like Eros, a generative morality opens out to the new, rather than seeking to map the present experience onto the previously known, the previously experienced.

A moral community is formed by personal appropriation, by personal commitment, by something like a "conversion" or transformation of the individuals who come to make up the

community. Rosemary Haughton, in The Transformation of Man (1967), explores the situation of those who are born into the community without having personally appropriated it. These children can be formed by the adult members of the community, they can learn and adhere to all the codes of the community, yet the formation they receive is not enough. It is only when they personally appropriate the community's values and codes, usually in an experience of crisis, when all that they have so far "taken for granted" is put at risk, that they become the equals of the community's original members, having passed beyond formation, having gone through a trans-forming experience. Perhaps it is more usual that we go through a sequence of modestly transformative experiences rather than a single peak experience that dramatically changes our lives. We suggest later that literature can contribute to these transformative experiences.

III. Literature: what it is and how it works

A. "Literature" and "Narrative" -- tentative (& stipulative) definitions

"Literature" as our culture currently conceives of it, Tzvetan Todorov points out, is a relatively new concept, going back only to the end of the eighteenth century. It arose in the distinction between useful or utilitarian uses of language, and a use of language that had no end or justification outside of itself (Todorov, 1987, pp. 4-6). Those texts that counted as "literature"--from the ancient to the contemporary--were their own

justification; if a literary work gave pleasure, the pleasure was "aesthetic," more like contemplation than the gratification of a desire or the satisfaction of a need. Archibald MacLeish expresses an extreme form of this view in his famous lines, "A poem should not mean/ But be" (MacLeish, p. 441).

Nevertheless, there has been and continues to be a tendency to try to take literature out of this category of the "useless" and to find some use for it, as there had been for the older concepts of poetry or poesy. Plato had found poetry useful in wrong ways: it aroused emotions, and, doubly removed from the truth as it was, it encouraged people to be satisfied with an imitation of an imitation. Writers as diverse as Horace and Philip Sidney and Matthew Arnold found a tension between usefulness and enjoyment, and often arrived at variations on Horace's formula, "He who combines the useful and the pleasing wins out by both instructing and delighting the reader" (Horace, 1970, p. 56; see Auge, 1989; Sidney, 1970; Arnold, 1970). In modern times, educational institutions, and American education in particular, influenced by Puritan asceticism, generally subordinated the pleasing to the useful, with aesthetic pleasure the sugar coating for an implicit or explicit utilitarian purpose.[3] We will suggest our own variation on this theme later.

For the sake of our present discussion, we suggest that literature comes from the larger domain of non-utilitarian language, or language without a direct referential or truth claim. But within this domain, what sets "literature" apart from

"non-literature" is the level of imaginative complexity or subtlety that distinguishes, say, a Margaret Atwood novel from a Harlequin Romance, or a parable or Zen koan from a nursery rhyme. Furthermore, in this paper, we will tend to focus particularly on narrative, not on all literature, though much of what we say will apply to non-narrative literature as well.[4]

Our focus on narrative follows from our sense that the human world is a constructed world (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Berger, 1969; Ricoeur, 1984-88; Bruner, 1986).[5] In literary narratives we "practice" making human worlds, we "play" at giving a human shape to experience. As with much of our play, the product may be imaginary, but the skills and competencies that are called into play are the same that we use in our "serious" work of constructing ourselves and our world. The narrativizing of experience is one of the more important aspects of world-building.

Ricoeur asserts that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (1984-88:1, p. 52). In this view, story or narrative is not just something we say or listen to, but something we do or experience. Narrativizing experience means coming to apprehend or perceive our individual or collective lives as having a shape like a narrative's, a meaningful temporal order or pattern. And for this pattern or shape to be humanly meaningful, it must "connect" with human concerns.

Since literary narratives are analogous to the narrativizing

of experience, developing our skills in moral reasoning using literary narratives should have some carry-over to our other uses of narrative. We should point out that since we consider narrative as the temporal shaping of human experience, for us the narrative forms of literature would include drama as well as fiction.

Narrative is concerned with "intention and its vicissitudes," which according to Jerome Bruner constitutes "a primary category system in terms of which experience is organized" (1986, pp. 18-19). The moral life is also concerned with "intention and its vicissitudes," with human action and with human possibilities within the world of action (never forgetting that action cannot be divorced from thought and affect).

Narrative literature, then, will provide an especially apt laboratory for questioning, examining, testing, and learning about the moral dimension of human life. In fact, Paul Ricoeur, Martha Nussbaum, and others see as one of the oldest functions of literary art "that it constitutes an ethical laboratory where the artist pursues, through the mode of fiction, experimentation with values" (Ricoeur, 1984-88:2, p. 59; see also Nussbaum, 1986, esp. Chap. 3, on Sophocles' Antigone). Using literature, author and readers can run "thought experiments" about the factors that condition human actions and about the various consequences of those actions.

Finally, we agree with William James that "all human thinking is essentially of two kinds--reasoning on the one hand, and narrative, descriptive, contemplative thinking on the other" (quoted in Bruner, 1986, p. xii). We think that development of the

capacity for narrative thinking is itself a positive contribution to our moral lives. In light of research that suggests narratives are a basic category of moral thinking (Tappan & Brown, 1991), we make our own the observation of Jerome Bruner:

> Insofar as we account for our own actions and for the human events that occur around us principally in terms of narrative, story, drama, it is conceivable that our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us. The common coin may be provided by the forms of narrative that the culture offers us. (Bruner, 1986, p. 69)

Accordingly, a moral education would use literature not to inculcate values, not to impress a specific moral code, but to facilitate both the construction of values and a sympathetic engagement with the experience of others. In this construction and engagement, the reader is not a spectator but a co-constructor of the meaning of the work, including its moral meaning.

B. How literature works

Literature, and narratives in particular, participate in the more general artistic function of constructing a world or a model of a world (Goodman, 1976, 1978; Ricoeur, 1984-88). Using a variety of cues in the literary text, we mobilize our imaginative, cognitive, and affective resources to "subjunctivize" reality, to co-construct a "subjunctive" world (Bruner, 1986, p. 26) or

imaginary world. "To be in the subjunctive mode," says Bruner, is "to be trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties" (p. 26). Literature's freedom from the constraints of the "real" world, and perhaps especially from the constraint to act, catalyzes this trafficking in human possibilities.

In this co-constructing or subjunctivizing process, our cognitive/sympathetic identification is elicited on two levels. We are invited to identify sympathetically with one or more characters, or at least with their plight; and we are invited to identify with the author, to adopt his or her values and vision as these shape the world of the story, its characters, and its action. Wayne Booth, in his detailed analyses of the rhetorical structure of fiction and of fiction's ethical effects, argues that we identify with the implied author (those aspects of the author we can know in and through the text) and that the "self" that we become in this process is a partial self we can call the implied reader (Booth, 1961; 1988). But for practical purposes in the classroom, we can collapse the real author and implied author into one, and do the same with the real and implied reader. In fact, in The Company We Keep, Booth himself tends to collapse together the implied reader and the real reader (Booth, 1988).

Sometimes character and author seem to share the same values and vision, but sometimes the values can be quite distinct (Huck Finn's position on slavery, for example, is quite different from Mark Twain's). And of course, on either level values and norms can be in conflict among themselves--in fact, such conflict may be at

the heart of the story. (See, for example, the internal conflict experienced by Huck Finn over how he should respond to the runaway slave Jim.)

There are ways of reading that avoid sympathetic identifications with author or character, ways that Louise Rosenblatt calls "efferent" (1994). In an efferent reading, we read in order to bring something away from the text--reading Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, for instance, to learn about the characteristic social interactions in small rural communities in mid-nineteenth-century America, or reading S.E. Hinton's The Outsiders to learn more about informal gangs in modern cities. Efferent readings yield information, but not formation, and certainly not transformation. For these, a reading that takes the text on its own terms is necessary, what Rosenblatt calls an "aesthetic" reading, one that cooperates in the co-constructing of the world of the text and enters sympathetically into it.

Some recent research suggests that even within the category of aesthetic reading, there are several characteristic reading styles. Dillon (1982) finds three basic styles of reading narratives. One is the Character-Action-Moral (CAM) style, in which "readers treat the world of the text as an extension or portion of the real world, [and] the characters as real persons, so that we will recognize the experience of characters as being like our own experience" (pp. 80-81).

Another basic reading style is the Digger for Secrets style. For Diggers, "the story enwraps secrets," hidden there by the

narrator or by the author, "and the reader must uncover them" (p. 83). This approach might focus on characters' unconscious motivations, or on the symbolic significance of various details of the story. A story like Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" would be much easier to read in this style than in the CAM style.

The third basic reading style is the Anthropologist style. Anthropologists are interested

> in identifying the cultural norms and values that explain what characters . . . do and say. Like Diggers for Secrets, these readers go beneath the surface and state things that are implicit and not said, though what they bring out is not a secret, but the general principles and values which the story illustrates as an example. (p. 85)

Thus, the Anthropological reader would be interested in exploring, for example, not Huck Finn's conscious or unconscious moral conflicts in his relations with the runaway slave Jim, but the way that the conflicting voices in Huck's conscience reflect or represent various strains of the larger community's public stands on slavery and on moral responsibility.

In view of this multiplicity of levels of sympathetic identification and of reading styles, we think that the best reader is the Nimble Reader--one who can move around among styles of reading and levels of sympathetic identification, without withdrawing to the safety and relative sterility of an efferent reading.

For literature does have power. As least sometimes, we find ourselves greatly moved, and perhaps permanently changed, through our experience of a particular literary work.

In a stimulating analysis of the moral power of literature, Auge (1989) uses as paradigm the difference between fables and parables. A fable like Aesop's "The Goose with the Golden Eggs" has a simple, obvious m al. Fables present moral lessons "that are clearly delineated extractable, and conveniently distilled from establis doctrine" (p. 8). They then transmit the conventional mo code, in the form of "ready-made rules and formulas" (p. 8) that present a simple schema of moral action.

Parables do something quite different. Auge (1989) uses as his main example the parable of the Good Samaritan. For its original hearers, this parable had a shocking effect--because, according to John Dominic Crossan (1975, pp. 104-108), Samaritans had about the same standing among the Jews of Jesus' day that drug addicts infected with AIDS have among middle-class Americans today. Auge states:

> By reversing our expectations, the parable forces us to reconsider our familiar notions of good and evil, to rethink the customary standards we use to make moral judgments. In contrast to fables, parables, such as "The Good Samaritan," present concrete human situations that are too complex to be subsumed under fixed moral formulas. (Auge, 1989, p. 9)

Auge then argues that works of literature are more like parables than like fables: "the moral significance of great literature resides less in its confirmation of received rules and precepts than in its subversion of conventional expectations, its dismantling of settled opinions, its opening of previously closed questions" (p. 10).

Fables, then, transmit the values endorsed by the community, while parables call such values or their accepted applications into question. We agree with Auge that great literature often has a parabolic effect, but we see the fable-effect and the parable-effect as two ends of a continuum. Furthermore, a literary work does not simply fall somewhere on the continuum. Literature of any complexity usually partly supports and partly challenges the conventional moral vision and conventional moral codes.[6]

One might also say the same for schools. John Dewey distinguished between two opposing visions of schooling: "education as a function of society" and "society as a function of education" (quoted in Lentricchia, 1983, p. 1, and in Tappan & Brown, 1991, p. 188). In the first view, schools reproduce the present society, particularly its values, in the next generation; in the second view, schools renovate society by making sure the next generation will be different from the present one. In practice, schools both reproduce and renovate, in varying degrees--partly maintaining, partly undermining the status quo. Schools too have both a fabular and a parabolic effect, and nowhere more, perhaps, than in the literature class.

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Studying literature in school is likely to provoke a lot of parable-effects. There will often be competing, contrasting, even clashing values and moral norms, partly as a function of the complexity of the work: within the constructed (literary) world and among its characters (and even within a single character); between the literary world and the reader's world; and between the literary character(s) and the reader's character. Becoming a Nimble Reader, learning to recognize and being able to discuss the various clashes of values and the consequent moral complexity in the world of the text, and between worlds of text and reader, can help students "read" similar clashes, similar complexities in themselves and in their own worlds, and among the various groups that elicit their allegiance.

If from their reading students take away models, paradigmatic stories, by which to make sense of their own lives and the lives of others, then a sensitivity to the parabolic as well as the fabular dimension of literature would be an important contribution to their moral development.

C. Conclusion of this section

Those who say that literature is irrelevant to moral formation are taking the traditional position that literature is "useless" rather than "useful" discourse. And we agree that to talk about "literature" working for moral development, which seems to value literature only for its usefulness in some other endeavor, <u>is</u> paradoxical. It is paradoxical because, for literature to play any

part in moral development, it must be taken seriously on its own terms, as a complex imaginative experience with cognitive and affective dimensions. It is aesthetic reading that makes possible the imaginative engagement that catalyzes a moral response. "Good books" cannot produce "good people." But what reading literature can do is broaden and deepen the sense of all that must be taken into account in order to form complex moral judgments. This sense is something that the current generation as well as the next needs to develop if we are to respond adequately to the complex problems we face as our communities become more diverse and more interconnected.

IV. Pedagogical implications of our approach

Literary studies in schools can cultivate competency in forming complex moral judgments, but only if the pedagogy is right. We propose that teachers can best establish the proper conditions for opening out the moral dimension of literature when they emphasize both individual reader responses and group processes that model and foster community. By creating a classroom environment in which diverse voices can be heard and brought into dialogue with one another, teachers can guide students toward ever more complex reflection about values.

A. Focusing on individual responses

Response to literature by individual readers is a useful starting point for a moral pedagogy of reading. In the first

place, construction of a more complex moral perspective depends on the ability to recognize and to go beyond previously unexamined assumptions that limit the imagining of possible worlds. Readers need to attend to these assumptions as they consider a work and compare its story world to their own worlds. A focus on response is also useful because the construction of moral meanings requires the involvement of emotion as well as thought and reason. Literary study that acknowledges the moral dimension of works must also validate the reader's affective response. In order to enable the enlargement of sympathies and sympathetic understanding we have discussed, readers must become aware of how they feel about what they read. They must also recognize the link between their feelings and their own particular life experiences as well as between their feelings and the features of the text.

The kind of teaching that would take into account the view of literature we have developed would emphasize Rosenblatt's "aesthetic" stance toward works of literature (Rosenblatt, 1994). The reader's own experience of the story's world can be a jumping-off point for both the close analysis of the text and the discussion of moral dilemmas posed therein. The many techniques for helping readers focus attention on their own experiences in relation to their reading of particular texts, such as those described by Bleich (1975), Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1990), and others[7] can help them contrast their own (constructed) world with the constructed world of the text. Keeping reading logs or response

journals, creating semantic maps, or dramatizing works are all classroom activities that can promote this purpose.

One potentially powerful way to promote readers' sense of how the narratives they read apply to the world they live in is by having them write narratives of their own experiences. Tappan and Brown (1991) describe a narrative approach to moral education in which children and adolescents tell stories about their moral decisions. This approach, they argue, allows students to develop authorship and authority, a sense that they are the makers of their own narratives. Surely such an approach could enhance, and be enhanced by, the reading and reconstructing of other people's stories.

B. Promoting Cognitive Complexity

The teacher of literature who wants to heighten students' awareness of moral dilemmas and of how to deal with them must require multilevel thinking and reasoning. Students ought to be encouraged to move back and forth mentally among the various levels in the transaction of reading (reader, character, and author) and between styles of reading (Character-Action-Moral, Digger of Secrets, and Archaeologist). In other words, the teacher must help each student become a Nimble Reader.

It is easy to think of some generic prompts that a teacher can use to guide students toward a better understanding of a work and its complexity. A teacher might ask students to try to infer what the author thinks from what the characters say and do, and to

compare or contrast what the characters say to the students' inferred impression of the author. They might ask students what they think of what the author thinks. The reader must be ever more nimble in order to engage imaginatively in dialogue with the author and infer what the author thinks the reader must be thinking.

A more sophisticated version of the elementary main idea comprehension task would lead readers through individual response to the Archaeologist style of reading, in order to infer why the author wanted things the way they are in the story. In other words, the reader would use the historical, cultural, or other knowledge that is part of the reader's personal perspective to go beyond that perspective and form an interpretation of the work as a whole (Scholes, 1985).

Stating the goal of literary studies this way helps to clarify the kind of growth in understanding we seek for students of literature: ever more inclusive and sophisticated constructions of reality by students. Furthermore, as Scholes (1985) urges, students could move from a sympathetic reading first to an interpretation and then to a critical response to the author's vision. (See also Nelms, 1988, for a discussion of a similar progression).

Recognizing and assessing this growth in literary understanding would require careful attention to how students talk about works and how they relate elements of texts they are reading to their own experience. Students' achievement in literary studies

must be judged by much more than the number of facts and plot details they can remember.

One of the main ways teachers influence how students respond to literature is through their selection of what to read. The list of the most commonly taught book-length works in U.S. public and private secondary schools suggests that teachers already have moral purposes in mind when selecting what to teach (see Applebee, 1993, p. 65; Applebee also includes lists of the most frequently anthologized short fiction and poems). Titles among the top ten, such as Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Huckleberry Finn, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Scarlet Letter, Of Mice and Men, and Lord of the Flies, are full of the kind of conflicting values and moral complexity that we have been discussing.[8] This is not to say that mere exposure to such works can have salutary effects in and of itself. Nevertheless, in conjunction with proper study materials and teacher guidance, which would encourage an aesthetic reading and a critical response to that reading, the works chosen can set the stage for growth in students' moral understanding.

C. Focusing on group process and formation of community

For such growth to take place, the study of literature must be done in a supportive context in which the teacher deliberately strives to model how moral discourse takes place within a community of readers. Students' real communities are those in which they live, and the "literate communities" that form in the classroom discussion of literature are artificial. Nevertheless, the

classroom community can overcome or at least diminish its artificiality through the careful cultivation of discussion and dialogue.

Discussion, long a favorite tool of English teachers, contains a potential to promote the "subjunctivization" that Bruner describes that more individualistic techniques cannot match (cf. Wolf, 1988). By bringing together many viewpoints, discussion increases the likelihood that students will see beyond their typically idiosyncratic perspectives (D. C. Griffey, personal communication, November 28, 1994). Discussion also allows students to make public affirmations about their own values. Through discussion, students become more aware of how the world and its values might be different. Participants in a discussion can see how various kinds of sympathies can be expressed. Furthermore, discussions of the moral dilemmas in literature acknowledge that each individual's reading is socially and culturally mediated.

In discussions, students of literature can practice tolerance and apply reason just as they might do as members of their own communities talking about decisions. Noddings (1991) suggests that a new paradigm of interpersonal reasoning guided by an ethic of caring is emerging as a basis for morality. If this is true, then the confluence of feeling, thinking, and personality that we have been describing is particularly apt for this new paradigm. Students collectively constructing the meaning of a work are modeling the same kinds of processes which are at work in everyday

morality. Of course, teachers must insure that an atmosphere of trust and caring exists in class before any of this can happen.

Using some new formats for talking about literature, such as the book clubs described by Raphael et al. (1992), teachers can do more than more traditional approaches allow, to open students to ranges of possibility. Student-led, small-group discussions facilitate the reading of a greater variety of texts as well as greater participation in discussion of them. With multiple-text strategies, perhaps incorporating neglected works from other cultures, teachers can widen the scope of moral discussion still further.[9]

Do teachers really have any influence over how students respond to literature? Purves (1981) has demonstrated that students' responses to literature are indeed shaped by their schooling. In the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) studies he conducted, students in each country responded to stories in a characteristic national style, which was the way they were taught in school. Therefore, collectively and cumulatively, teachers do have a significant effect on the kinds of reasoning their students develop. We infer from Purves's findings that teachers <u>can</u> help students use literature to develop the moral dimension of their thinking.

It then becomes a matter of teachers defining their proper role in guiding students' moral reasoning. We do not think it is particularly helpful for teachers to "keep their distance," as extreme proponents of reader-response would recommend, to avoid

pre-empting students' individual responses. The pristine encounters with texts implied by this view do not really take place. On the other hand, since teachers <u>are</u> authority figures in the classroom (with the power of the gradebook), they must be careful not to present their own view as the only acceptable one, nor to pre-empt students' responses. Teachers can make the moral issues of literature a part of the instruction without preaching or otherwise imposing their views (in fact, the resentful responses of students to multicultural literature presented in too heavy-handed a way show the danger of such imposition). They can do this by helping their students to sharpen their own sense of what is at stake morally in the story world, or by helping them to contrast the world of the book with their own world. They might also occasionally relate to their students their own changing responses to a literary work being studied. The process of teaching, reading, and learning needs to be reflective and interactive.

V. Conclusion

We do not claim that the approach to literary study outlined here will produce moral individuals. But it can help form one kind of proficiency needed by mature adults in a complex world. The classroom cannot force transformation either of the individual or of societies, but it can promote a formation that provides the "felicity conditions" that make transformation more probable. The moral communities facilitated by this kind of literary study might rather more resemble families who discuss and argue (and also

listen), than choirs in which everyone sings the same tune. These communities may not reach an easy consensus, but they will be capable of responding on the moral level to the complicated situations they--we--face.

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Notes

1. Our discussion of "moral reasoning" is strongly influenced by the developmental psychology of Jerome Bruner, who insists that emotions, cognitions, and actions do not exist separately from one another, "each in isolation, but [are] aspects of a larger whole that achieves its integration only within a cultural system" (Bruner, 1986, p. 117). That larger whole, in which thoughts, feelings, and acts are structurally interdependent (p. 118), is the mental life of the individual, and it has inescapably a moral dimension.

2. Applebee (1974) documents the long-standing suspicion of fiction and drama in U.S. schools as threats to morals. He mentions, for example, one Boston teacher who was fired in 1828 for teaching Shakespeare. Horace Mann, one of the greatest influences on the American common school tradition, argued against teaching novels because they appealed to emotion rather than reason. Applebee attributes the eventual acceptance of literature by teachers in part to their appropriation of Matthew Arnold's theory of classical literature as a bulwark against the decline of Western civilization and its values.

3. The history of English studies in U.S. schools, for Applebee (1974), is a series of attempts to sidestep or co-opt the imaginative power of narrative forms in the pursuit of other purposes. First among these purposes was the teaching of reading. The McGuffey's Eclectic Reader series, which long dominated elementary education, used exemplary stories simultaneously to

teach children to read and to inculcate the Protestant ethic. At American universities in the nineteenth century, literary works were used as material for declamation, or as illustrations of the history of the English language and culture. Harvard's entrance requirements of 1873-74 set the tone for high-school uses of literature for years to come: "literature was to be studied, not for itself or even for philology, but as a subject for composition" (Applebee, 1974, p. 30).

With the advent of the Progressive movement in the early twentieth century came still more rationales for literature, now to promote social reform and child development. Tchudi and Mitchell (1989) describe several attempts to break with the tradition imposed by the university entrance requirements of the previous century. Objectives for the study of literature from An Experience Curriculum in English, a characteristic text of that era, included "To observe man's industrial expansion" and "To observe the effects of widening trade horizons on our daily lives" (reproduced in Tchudi and Mitchell, p. 15). An extreme progressivist manifestation, the Life Adjustment movement, prompted attempts to "correlate" literature thematically with more useful school subjects under rubrics of "Family Relationships," "Consumer Problems," and the like (Applebee, 1974, p. 143). Applebee points out that the "life adjustment" emphasis in secondary literary study that grew out of these efforts in the early 1950's managed to include discussion of adolescent problems without touching much upon morality. World War II, the Cold War, and Sputnik eventually

reversed the pendulum, and by the 1960's, literary study in school once again emphasized knowledge of language and communication.

Nell (1988) discusses these same utilitarian and anti-aesthetic tendencies in the English-speaking world at large, tracing their origins as Applebee (1974) does to Puritan asceticism. The treatment of literature in schools that Nell describes is surely also related to the transformation of industrial labor described by Rodgers (1974) and the concomitant attempt to make students avoid literary pleasure and learn to value the monotonous toil of factory employment. Today, the functionalizing of literature can still be seen in both the Academic tradition, whenever literature is used to promote "cultural literacy" (Hirsch, 1987), and the Progressive tradition, as in attempts to use Steinbeck and Shakespeare within a "tech prep" curriculum.

4. For a discussion of the truth-value of fiction, see Searle (1975) and Ricoeur (1984-88; 1979a).

5. Peter Berger points out that "Man's world is imperfectly programmed by his own constitution [instincts]. It is an open world. That is, it is a world that must be fashioned by man's own activity" (1969, p. 5). Through social practice, perhaps especially the social practice of language, humans produce a world and in doing so "finish" themselves; they produce themselves in a world. Furthermore, "the socially constructed world is, above all, an ordering of experience. A meaningful order, or nomos, is imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals"

(Berger, 1969, 19). For a human being, experience is essentially temporal; therefore the nomos will be especially an ordering of the temporal. And among the forms of discourse, narrative is the language form that most directly reflects in its very structure as well as its content the temporal shape of human experience as it moves through time (Collins, 1988/89; Ricoeur, 1979b; 1984-1988).

6. Fables typically come from an "insider," someone who is comfortable with the culture and with whom the culture is comfortable: Aesop, La Fontaine. Parables, on the other hand, typically originate in an "outsider," someone critical of the culture, whom the culture either rejects or remains suspicious of: Nathan (who rebuked King David by a parable), Jesus. The artist or writer in our culture has an ambiguous status. Partly celebrated, partly suspected, the writer is partly inside and partly outside conventional culture. An important reason for this ambiguous status, we suggest, is that the literature produced by these artists partakes of the fable as well as the parable, the parable as well as the fable.

7. See Karolides (1992) for several more examples.

8. Materials promoting a sensitive reading of many of these works are available--for example, the detailed activities for Of Mice and Men prepared by the English Centre of the Inner London Education Authority (English Centre, 1980). Consider a sample exam-type essay question included in the packet: "Do you think George would have shot Lennie if Curley had not been involved? What other options would have been open to him?" (p. 32). By

including the conditional clause, the question requires students to attend to a detail relevant to moral choice that they might otherwise have missed. Elsewhere in the packet, readers are encouraged to read closely passages describing Curley's wife and Crooks, a character in the story who is black. By doing so and then writing letters to the characters or writing imaginary scenes in which they develop the characters more fully, students can begin to empathize with the characters, to recognize how they might be being treated unjustly, and to think deeply about the contingencies that have shaped them.

Similar teaching techniques can be applied to other "classic" works. Students can debate who was the most guilty party in The Scarlet Letter, or discuss Romeo and Juliet's motives, or imagine--before they start to read--how they themselves might behave if left alone on an island paradise without any adult authorities. They can construct a dialogue between a character and the author (between Huck Finn and Mark Twain, for example), or between characters in different stories.

9. Just as with The Scarlet Letter, students could consider what it would be like to live in a severe 17th century town, so they might consider with Things Fall Apart what it might be like to be colonized, to have one's most fundamental beliefs challenged and one's way of life profoundly changed.